s. No	Description 2l	Year 300-01	Year 2001-02	Year 2002-03
17.	Aerated waters and soft drinks (Chapter 21) Specialized packaging for food processing industries (Chapter 48, 76)	40%	32%	32%*"
18.		16%	16%	16%
19	Total Revenue collected (Rs. crore)	2049	1688	1881

*Duty on sugar confectionery excluding white chocolate was reduced to 8% *w.e.f.* March, 2003.

"Duty on Biscuits was reduced to 8% *w.e.f.* March, 2003.

***Duty on aerated waters and soft drinks was reduced to 24% *w.e.f.* March, 2003.

Items, other than mentioned above, are in general exempt from excise duty.

IRDA's delegation to United States

*317. SHRIMATI BIMBARAIKAR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether top functionaries of Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority are on a fact-finding mission to the United States; and

(b) if so, the details in this regard including the areas of interest of the mission.

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. A team consisting of Chairman, two wholetime Members, an Executive Director of IRDAand Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Finance recently visited United States of America and Canada to study the regulations of insurance market alongw: in the effectiveness of mechanisms to protect the interests of policyholders in these countries, also their relevance and applicability in India.

Improvement of Guwahati Airport

*318. SHRI ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to refer to Unstarred Question 1 given in the Rajya Sabha on 26th February, 2002 and state:

(a) the item-wise, details of achievements made and target set for implementation of two aerobridges, visitors' lounge and associated works like taxi parking lot;

(b) the operation status of international flights to and from Guwahati and implementation status of the proposal for making Guwahati a regional hub of North-Eastern States; and

(c) the details of existing operational schedule of ATR aircraft, proposed for future, indicating proposal to reduce the fare by ensuring subsidy from NEC?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI RAJIV PRATAP RUDY): (a) Item-wise details of achievements made in this regard are as under:

(i) The drawings for provision of aerobridges have been prepared and technical bid for procurement of aerobridges has been opened on 25.11.2003 and are being evaluated.

(ii) The construction and installation works of aero bridges are likely to commence from March 2004 and likely to be completed by March 2006. .

(iii) An Airport Upkeep Initiative has also been undertaken to improve the passenger facilities and ambience at the airport.

(iv) The work pertaining to ceremonial lounge, extension of city side canopy to the terminal building and car parking lot are being planned considering the necessity and security measures.

(b) Air India commenced international operations from Guwahati to Bangkok with twice weekly flights *w.e.f.* 4.4.2002. However, this was discontinued *w.e.f.* 27.4.2003, as it was not commercially viable in view of the limited international traffic at Guwahati.

Air connectivity with ATR-B-737/A-320 aircraft is presently provided from Guwahati to Aizwal, Dimapur, Lilabari, Silchar, Agartala & Imphal within North-East and to Kolkata, Bagdogra, Delhi and Patna outside North East. Guwahati is also being developed for a night halting ATR aircraft in the near future. This is likely to be implemented after creation of suitable infrastructure at Guwahati.

(c) As per the winter schedule, Kolkata is connected to Dimapur,

Aizwal, Silchar, Shillong, Agartala and Guwahati is connected to Kolkata, Dimapur, Lilabari, Agartala, Aizwal, Silchar and Imphal through ATR aircraft. After induction of ATR aircraft, the number of seats offered in Alliance Air flights have been increased from 4120 to 6324. The estimated loss in operation of ATR services works out to Rs. 38 crores per annum. The scheme envisages financial assistance of Rs. 35 crores per annum from the Union Government. Even with the uncovered gap of Rs. 3 crores per annum, the fare structure for Jet and ATR services are the same. As such, there is no scope for reduction in fares on ATR services.

Operations of GIC in foreign countries

*319. SHRIMURLIDEORA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether GIC and its subsidiaries have been carrying out insurance business in foreign countries;

(b) if so, the details thereof alongwith the amount invested;

(c) whether the losses have been increasing sharply and if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the steps contemplated to run the business in profit?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) The four public sector general insurance companies, which are no longer GIC's subsidiaries, have been carrying out insurance business through branches or agencies or subsidiary/associated companies in 18 countries. The details of amounts invested and the net profits/losses incurred by these companies are given below.

Amount invested by the companies

	1998-99	1999-2000	?000-01	2001-02	2002-03	
Name of the company	Amount invested	Amount invested	Amount invested	Amount invested	Amount invested	Investment as on 31 3.2003
New India	43.15	0.00	0.00	109.19	132.28	313.45
National	11.85	1.18	1.19	43.82	4.77	77.65
Oriental	—	3.18	(-)1-17	4.45	8.56	48.24
United India	0.00	0.00	19.47	13	0.00	32.91